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Item 6 of the provisional agenda
Report on activities of the Executive Committee

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Note by the Chairman of the Executive Committee

I. Background

1. The rules of procedure of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) require basic documents to be prepared in relation to the agenda items as appropriate. This document is being submitted to support the discussions under item 6 at the sixty-sixth session of ECE.

II. Functions of the Executive Committee

2. The Executive Committee (EXCOM) was established by ECE member States as a result of the Reform of 2005. According to the Work Plan on ECE Reform (E/ECE/1434/Rev.1), EXCOM acts on behalf of the Commission between the biennial sessions of the latter and can seize itself of all matters related to ECE activities in conformity with its Terms of Reference. The implementation of the overall guidance set by the Commission is entrusted to EXCOM.

3. EXCOM has the following main functions:

(a) Preparing the sessions of the Commission;

(b) Ensuring programmatic coherence and oversight: approving the programme of work of the Sectoral Committees and reviewing its implementation; approving groups under the Sectoral Committees; reviewing the strategic framework and programme narratives; avoiding duplication and overlap in ECE activities; and exchanging views with the Chairs of the Sectoral Committees;

(c) Addressing any emerging issues calling for a decision in between the biennial sessions of the Commission;

(d) Overseeing the work of the secretariat.

4. At its sixty-third session in 2009, ECE decided that the Chairperson and Vice-chairpersons of the Commission would also serve as the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of EXCOM for the period of the biennium.

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5. At its sixty-fifth session in 2013, the Commission elected Netherlands as its Chair, and Switzerland and Turkmenistan as its Vice-chairs.

6. EXCOM meets on an ad hoc basis and the agenda of each meeting is set by the Chairperson in consultation with the Vice-chairpersons and the Executive Secretary.

7. The Chairs of the Sectoral Committees – or the Vice-Chairs – are invited to the meetings of EXCOM to report on the work of their respective Committees. At each meeting, the Executive Secretary briefs EXCOM on the latest developments and major activities carried out by the secretariat.

III. Main achievements

8. In accordance with paragraph 27 of the Outcome of the review of the 2005 reform of ECE, the Executive Committee should "see to it that all subsidiary bodies and the secretariat apply the Guidelines on Procedures and Practices". During the reporting period, the Committee on Housing and Land Management at its sixty-fifth session in October 2014 adopted its Rules of Procedure which were subsequently reviewed by EXCOM and considered to be in line with the Guidelines on Procedures and Practices for ECE bodies. EXCOM also approved the "UN/CEFACT structure, mandate, terms of reference and procedures, Revision 5".

9. The secretariat continued the practice of circulating for the information of the permanent missions prior to meetings of the ECE subsidiary bodies: draft lists of participants; nominated candidates for the Bureaux of different ECE bodies; draft decisions, conclusions and recommendations.

10. All in all, since the last Commission session until the time of submission of this report, EXCOM held 14 meetings and 10 informal consultations, and two more formal meetings and approximately three informal consultations are expected to be held before the Commission session in April 2015. The following are the matters seized by EXCOM at its various meetings over the past intersessional period:

(a) Preparations for the sixty-sixth Commission session in 2015;

(b) ECE input to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council;

(c) Approval of the organization of ECE regional meetings: i) Regional Ministerial Consultation on Monitoring and Accountability for the ECE region, September 2014; ii) Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting, November 2014; iii) Regional Preparatory Meeting on Financing for Sustainable Development to be held in March 2015;

(d) Approval of the ECE Evaluation Policy and the 2014–2015 evaluation work plan;

(e) ECE Strategic Framework and the proposed programme budget for the 2016–2017 biennium;

(f) ECE technical cooperation activities 2012 and 2013;

(g) Approval of extrabudgetary projects;

(h) Process for strengthening transparency and accountability in the use of all extrabudgetary resources (whereby EXCOM will be regularly informed about extrabudgetary funding, including the use of resources and concrete results under all projects throughout the project cycle in accordance with the template of EXCOM; and all extrabudgetary projects will require EXCOM approval except: (i) those approved by

EXCOM as part of work programmes of ECE Sectoral Committees as well as (ii) those approved by the Contracting Parties as part of the programme work of the convention bodies);

(i) The Committee on Trade and the Committee on Economic Cooperation and Integration;

(j) Issues relating to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), including the establishment of an EXCOM contact group to UN/CEFACT;

(k) Approval of matters relating to Sectoral Committees:

(i) the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2014–2015 and the establishment and terms of reference of the Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS);

(ii) the programme of work of the Transport subprogramme for 2014–2015; the renewal of the mandate and terms of reference of the Group of Experts towards Unified Railway Law; and the establishment of the Group of Experts on Safety at Level Crossings and the Group of Experts on Road Signs and Signals;

(iii) the programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme, including the establishment of three task forces;

(iv) the establishment and terms of reference of the Public-Private Partnership Business Advisory Board; and the revised terms of reference of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies;

(v) the terms of reference and programme of work of the Committee on Sustainable Energy; the mandates and terms of reference of its subsidiary bodies; and the work plans of the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels (2014–2015), the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane (2014–2015), the Group of Experts on Gas (2014–2015), and the Expert Group on Resource Classification (2013–2014);

(vi) the ECE-FAO integrated programme of work on Forestry and Timber for 2014–2017; the programme of work of the Forestry and Timber subprogramme for 2014–2015, and mandates and terms of reference of subsidiary bodies under the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry;

(v) the programme of work of the Housing and Land Management subprogramme for 2014–2015; and the renewal of mandates and terms of reference of the Working Party on Land Administration and the Real Estate Market Advisory Group;

(l) Endorsement of the Geneva United Nations Charter on Sustainable Housing;

(m) Matters relating to the Working Group on Ageing;

(n) Legislative mandates.

IV. Challenges and way ahead

11. At the time of submission of this document, EXCOM is in the process of preparing the draft of the negotiated outcome of the sixty-sixth session of the Commission. The challenge is to come up with a short and punchy political statement of ECE member States that provides a vision and direction for the next two years whilst demonstrating their

commitment and support to the work of the organization, in a manner that will enable it to respond adequately to the needs and priorities of member States, particularly for the implementation of the post-2015 agenda and the expected Sustainable Development Goals.

12. EXCOM, in its capacity as governing body, acting on behalf of the Commission in the intersessional period, needs to ensure that the strategic directions established by the Commission are implemented. Its decisions need to be made in an efficient and effective way, with due consideration of the relevant issues and in due time, and in a manner that is transparent and inclusive.

13. During the reporting period, in the implementation of Commission decision A (65) on the Outcome of the review of the 2005 reform of ECE, EXCOM spent a great deal of time and energy at numerous formal and informal meetings, including bilateral consultations, discussing the action to be taken with regard to the Committee on Trade and the Committee on Economic Cooperation and Integration. A decision on this matter is expected very soon whereby the former is expected to be replaced by a Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, and the latter will be renamed as Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, with slightly revised terms of reference. Following this decision, EXCOM will need to follow up on its implementation and most likely will need to monitor the performance of the two committees for some time.

14. A number of areas require continued attention by EXCOM in the near future. These include: oversight and governance over the work of ECE in different sectors through, inter alia, interaction with chairpersons of Sectoral Committees; the application of the "Guidelines on Procedures and Practices for ECE bodies"; the legislative mandates to be included in the strategic framework underpinning the programmes of work; implementation of the ECE evaluation policy; extrabudgetary projects and their monitoring.

15. The real challenge for EXCOM is to ensure that, through effective interaction between member States and the secretariat, this governing body will focus on strategic and programmatic issues within its competence. At the same time, it needs to entrust the secretariat with efficient implementation and servicing of the various sectoral committees and convention bodies, and create the best conditions for ECE to continue its inspiring and multifaceted work that benefits the citizens in our member States.

16. Despite the enormous diversity between the countries of the ECE region and the recent economic challenges that have emerged, ECE member States can put their differences aside and continue to produce concrete and practical standards, best practices and international instruments that contribute to sustainable development in the ECE region and beyond.

17. Reaching multilateral agreements is no easy task. Yet ECE, with its 56 member States, has demonstrated to the world that in this region it is possible to agree. There is plenty of work ahead to reach concrete results in support of the future Sustainable Development Goals and EXCOM will play an essential role here due to its good cooperation with the secretariat.